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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that the security forces have imposed total closure on the territories until Tuesday. This is the first time such a measure has been taken for the holiday of Purim.

Maariv quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying in recent defense establishment meetings that Israel will withdraw from the Gaza Strip only after the U.S. presidential elections. Leading media reported that Thursday PM Sharon resumed his efforts to persuade recalcitrant right-wing ministers to accept his unilateral disengagement plan. He met with Education Minister Limor Livnat (Likud) and Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman (National Union). Ha'aretz reported that next week the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlers in the Territories will intensify its protests against Sharon's plan.

Maariv and Globes published new revelations regarding Elchanan Tenenbaum. Maariv reported that Kayes Obeid, the Israeli Arab and Hezbollah agent who set up Tenenbaum's Dubai trip was a Shin Bet agent prior to Tenenbaum's abduction. Sharon's son Gilad, Tenenbaum and Shimon Cohen, the father of Tenenbaum's estranged wife were involved in a 1992 land deal. Maariv asserts that a senior associate of Sharon explicitly threatened its reporters investigating the affair. Globes reported that the friendship between Sharon and Shimon Cohen went on until at least March 1991. Maariv cited the response of Sharon's bureau that his family is not linked to the land deal and that Gilad does not know Tenenbaum.

-Leading media reported that Thursday Knesset members on the Right expressed outrage at reports that Sharon associates blamed the Right for Wednesday's revelations in Maariv.

-All media reported that Tenenbaum is now being investigated under tougher conditions, as crime, not security, becomes the focus of the probe. Ha'aretz reported that the police will give him another polygraph test, after they have finished interrogating him about alleged criminal offenses.

-Thursday, the High Court of Justice declined to debate the plea bargain reached between the state and Tenenbaum.

All media (banners in Ha'aretz and Hatzofe) reported that Eliran Cohen, a 22-year-old Jew from Haifa, was arrested on suspicion of having carried out nine attacks against Arabs in the Haifa area, including a bombing attempt of the car of Hadash Knesset Member Issam Makhoul in October 2003. Eliran's father, Meir Cohen, is suspected of having provided him with weapons and explosives. Israel Radio reported that a 22-year-old IDF soldier, who is a resident of Ashdod, was arrested last night on suspicion of involvement in the case. Makhoul was quoted as saying that Jewish terrorism, which reached its peak with the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, is "alive and kicking."

Ha'aretz reported that the IDF recently conducted a simulation "war game" about what could happen the day after PA Chairman Yasser Arafat passes away. The exercise examined several scenarios and how Arafat's death -- by natural causes -- would influence the domestic situation in the PA and its relations. Security sources told Ha'aretz that the exercise was

not a result of any new information about the state of Arafat's health.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Thursday the High Court of Justice postponed the evacuation of six illegal outposts by 10 more days.

Ha'aretz reported that a planned new IDF committee will apply the same criteria to both genders seeking army deferrals because of pacifism.

Leading media reported that next week FM Silvan Shalom will hold talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Egyptian FM Ahmed Maher. Yediot reported that Shalom will propose a deal in which Azzam Azzam, an Israeli jailed for spying in Egypt, would be released. This will be Shalom's first visit to Egypt.

All media reported that Thursday at a press conference held at the Prime Minister's Office, Internal Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi announced the replacement of the current security system for public transportation, which he said had failed, with a new USD 7-million plan, sponsored by the Chicago-based International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. The group donated an initial sum of USD 1 million to Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that Thursday the High Court of Justice rejected a petition filed against the IDF's plan to demolish 20 Palestinian houses in Hebron, but decided to accept the army's revised request to raze only two of the houses.

Ha'aretz (Zvi Bar'el) presented negative and positive views of intellectuals and politicians from various Arab countries regarding the Greater Middle East Initiative.

Jerusalem Post reported that Victor Marrero, a federal judge in New York, "shot down the PA's legal defense strategy" in a USD 500 million terrorism lawsuit, declaring that the Palestinian claim of sovereign immunity does not hold up in U.S. courts. Noted American Middle East expert Professor Bernard Lewis predicted, in an interview with Yediot, that a revolution will take place in Iran in two to three years.

Ha'aretz reported on a Health Ministry decision, in principle, to approve cloning human embryos for scientific research and producing embryonic stem cells.

Yediot published the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll:

- 66 percent of Israelis do not trust the government.
- 59 percent of respondents believed that Sharon's motives for having Tenenbaum freed were untainted.
- 53 percent believe that Sharon should reign because of the affairs currently under police investigation.
- "If Sharon quits, whom would you like to replace him as PM?" Shaul Mofaz: 30 percent (41 percent among Likud voters); Binyamin Netanyahu: 26 percent (37 percent among Likud voters); Ehud Olmert and Silvan Shalom: 8 percent each; none of the proposed choices: 24 percent (3 percent of Likud voters).

Mideast:

Summary:

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "Sharon wouldn't be able to commit himself to an evacuation from the Gaza Strip, while Bush would find it hard to provide him with financial grants before the elections."

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "What is happening is no less than a revolution, albeit a tentative one, in the way the U.S. views its Middle East policy."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Americans, and the other forces that are aiding them in Iraq, have also defined themselves as an army of occupation, but they repeatedly stress that this is to last for only a relatively short time. The IDF has had this reality forced upon it for decades and there are no real signs of a substantial change in the foreseeable future."

Block Quotes:

I. "Where Is He Running To?"

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (March 5): "In Washington, people are aware of the disputes taking place in Jerusalem around Sharon's unilateral evacuation plan from Gaza. Not everyone [in Washington] is prepared to accept his belief that he can implement his plan. Many people are expecting a government crisis. President Bush's close advisers ... are suggesting that the confrontations concerning the Gaza Strip be postponed until after the presidential elections. Some have even proposed that Sharon's visit be put off until after the elections. Bush considers himself committed to meeting Sharon in the near future. Some people say that it would happen no later than early April, perhaps even earlier. They say that the meeting would be purely formal, without real commitments. Sharon wouldn't be able to commit himself to an evacuation from the Gaza Strip, while Bush would find it hard to provide him with financial grants before the elections. Both sides understand each other well, say Israeli government and Capitol Hill officials. Sharon isn't prepared to admit at this juncture that his Washington visit will be purely formal. He is still pinning great hopes on it."

II. "Lessons of the Latest Debacle"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 5): "What is happening is no less than a revolution, albeit a tentative one, in the way the U.S. views its Middle East policy. If in the past, consecutive U.S. administrations have swallowed the Arab propaganda line that no reforms of their dictatorships were possible until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved, today the Bush administration is rejecting this lie. Speaking in Cairo this week, Undersecretary of State Mark Grossman said, 'The effort for reform in Arab countries does not have to wait until there is a full peace.' And what is Israel doing in the face of this welcome and courageous American policy? Our government is rejecting it, by deed if not by word. By courting Mubarak while he leads the charge against the U.S. initiative to bring freedom to the Arab world we are strengthening Mubarak and his authoritarian government that has made Egypt the epicenter of Arab anti-Semitism and the gravest conventional threat to Israeli security.... And where is the Israeli media? Aside from laconic reports of the American initiative, buried in the back pages of the newspapers and at the tail ends of news broadcasts, never to be repeated, there has been no media discussion of the strategic ramifications of the American initiative."

III. "What Makes the IDF Unique"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 5): "The IDF is a disciplined army that is under democratic civilian authority and at this time, this democracy, even if it wanted to, cannot free itself of the control over another people. This, more than anything else, is what makes the IDF unique today. This is a negative distinction that the world is witnessing. It is inconceivable that this is not affecting the IDF and that it will not ultimately erode its morality. The Americans, and the other forces that are aiding them in Iraq, have also defined themselves as an army of occupation, but they repeatedly stress that this is to last for only a relatively short time. The IDF has had this reality forced upon it for decades and there are no real signs of a substantial change in the foreseeable future."

KURTZER